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Representative
Christine Rolfes

**2010
Session
Update**

Spring 2010

Dear Neighbor,

The 2010 Legislative Session concluded in mid-April, and I am glad to be home with my family and back at work in Kitsap County. During the session's 90 days, 145 elected representatives from around the state (your Legislature) worked together in Olympia to tackle the variety of challenges posed by the nation's economic recession.

Although the discussion was dominated by the need to balance the state budget and readjust state agencies and services to a new economic reality, we also made progress on other issues important to our region. This newsletter is an update on some of the work we accomplished during the 2010 session. It is not exhaustive—more information about the budget, new taxes, or specific bills can be found through my legislative website at <http://housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/rolfes>

My sincere thanks to those of you who have taken the time to contact me this year to share your concerns or ideas, particularly those who traveled to Olympia to testify at hearings or meet with me and other legislators. No one person has all the answers, and your feedback is critical to the process.

And thank you for the honor of representing you in Olympia. These are difficult economic times for many, and I'm proud to be part of an engaged community that so strongly supports its members.

Regards,

Christine Rolfes

Christine Rolfes



Making our Transportation System Work Better

I am a member of the House Transportation Committee. This gives me a good platform for implementing the recommendations and ideas that you send me during the year. The Legislature has been leading a series of reforms to the Washington State Ferries department (WSF), beginning with my comprehensive ferry reform bill (HB 2358) in 2007.



This year I co-sponsored HB 3209 to establish better cost containment and provide for the long-term sustainability of ferry operations. This bill changes the way that labor contracts are negotiated, reviews the costs of ferry maintenance efforts, and requires an outside review of the system's management structure to identify further efficiencies. We also directed WSF to re-examine the methods it uses to estimate fuel costs and to put on hold its efforts to implement a reservation system for central Puget Sound.

This session we took action to better protect the personal privacy of Tacoma Narrows Bridge drivers and to change the way that tolls will be collected and violations will be processed. These changes are expected to save millions of dollars in administrative costs when they go into effect next year, and they played a key role in preventing higher tolls this year. I was proud to lead this effort in the House.

This summer we anticipate the start of work to replace the Manette Bridge in Bremerton. We also hope to see the completion of the first Washington state ferry vessel to be built since 1999. All told, the state transportation budget, primarily funded through gas taxes, is expected to create or sustain **18,000** jobs around the state, right when we need them most.

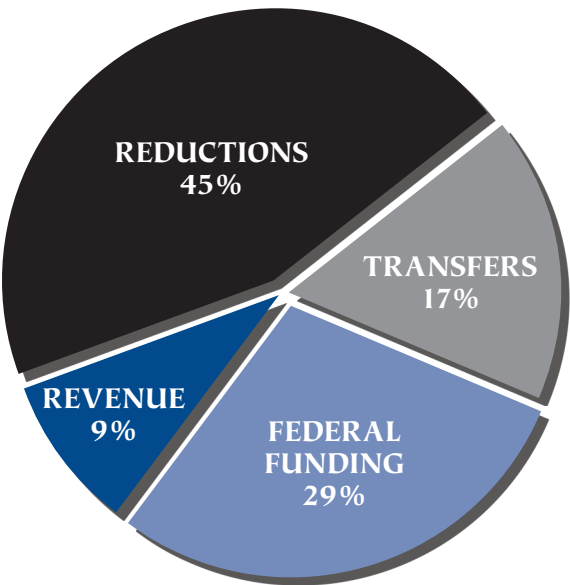
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2010 Session Update



Confronting State Budget Challenges



Balancing the state’s two-year operating budget was by far the biggest challenge that we faced during the 2010 session. Over the past two years, we have worked to close an unprecedented \$9 billion shortfall in the 2009-2011 budget. Almost two-thirds of the budget is reserved as pass-through to local school districts, for federal mandates, and for debt service, and it cannot be cut. The remaining discretionary funding was the target of legislative budget debates.

The final budget combined program cuts, agency reforms, wage freezes and benefit reductions, federal stabilization grants, fund transfers, and temporary and permanent tax increases (including closing tax loopholes for out-of-state businesses). Although the cuts to our schools and health care system were gut-wrenching, the tax increases were no less difficult. The chart to the left shows how the shortfall was addressed.

The final result is a balanced budget, with \$480 million in reserves. At \$31 billion, this budget is the first time since 1951 that a Washington state biennial budget is smaller than the previous one. Among the reductions in spending:

- 4,000 fewer state employee positions
 - Corrections and criminal justice cut 9.5%
- Health care cut 14.2%
 - Higher education cut 14.7%

Although the budget includes serious cuts, it still sustains our vital public safety, education, and community health care systems. I hope it positions our state to lead the nation out of the recession while taking care of our most vulnerable citizens. I voted for it, not because it was the budget I would have developed, but because during these extraordinary times it is my responsibility as a legislator to help balance competing needs and move the state forward.

Our Schools and Colleges

As a taxpayer and a parent with kids in the school system, I share a vested interest with many of you in the future of our public schools, and I fought heavily against further cuts to the K-12 system. Despite my efforts, an additional \$120.5 million was cut from some discretionary programs within the state’s overall \$13.4 billion education commitment, but the Legislature did agree to preserve funding to reduce classroom sizes in the younger grades and to continue all-day kindergarten and early learning for educationally at-risk children.

The Legislature continued its work on education reform this year in collaboration with parents, teachers and school administrators. Needed changes were adopted, including efforts to help improve the effectiveness of principals and teachers and new mechanisms for turning around low-performing schools.

While our community colleges and higher education institutions also felt the effect of reduced state spending, the Legislature agreed to maintain its commitment to financial aid for Washingtonians, and it invested an additional \$17.6 million in worker retraining programs. The new four-year degree initiatives at Olympic College were also preserved.

We also approved a jobs-creation and school-construction proposal bill that will now go to the voters this November. I supported this bill—called the Jobs, Opportunity, and Better Schools Act—because it is expected to create thousands of jobs and save taxpayers millions of dollars a year by repairing existing public schools and colleges to make them more energy efficient. The proposal requires the approval of about \$500 million in state construction bonds.



Keeping our Communities Safe

We all were shocked by the senseless murders last year of the law enforcement officers in Lakewood and Seattle. Following the recommendation of a task force convened by the Governor, the Legislature responded by making changes to several laws.

- HJM 4220 would allow judges to withhold bail for anyone charged with a crime punishable by life in prison, rather than only for people charged with capital offenses. Because this change would amend our state’s constitution, it will be subject to a vote of the people this November.
- Another bill, HB 2625, requires that bail for a person arrested for a felony offense may be granted only by a judge. The bill also improves the bail process by providing courts with better guidance on what level of bail to consider.
- The Legislature also improved the involuntary treatment act to allow earlier professional interventions for mentally ill citizens, to provide more timely treatment.

Healthy Communities



I have heard from many of you with very different opinions about the federal health insurance reform bill that was passed in March. The state Office of the Insurance Commissioner and a statewide task force are monitoring the implementation of the reforms carefully.

If you or someone you know has been uninsured due to a pre-existing, chronic condition, a new opportunity may be available soon to help provide insurance through the state’s Health Insurance Partnership. You can find more information about the new law online at <http://www.insurance.wa.gov>. Look for the “Health Care Reform” section.

A Cleaner Environment



As the Vice-Chair of the House Ecology and Parks Committee, I place a high priority on cleaning up waterways and protecting families from toxins. This year was marked by the following efforts:

- A ban on the use of the chemical bisphenol A in baby bottles, sippy cups, and water bottles;
- A plan developed in conjunction with the automotive industry to phase out the use of copper in brake pads, creating a national model for reducing pollutants in stormwater runoff;
- A law requiring lighting manufacturers to help recycle and reuse the mercury from spent compact fluorescent light bulbs;
- My initiative to remove derelict fishing gear from Puget Sound waters.